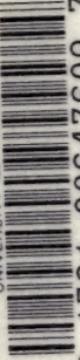


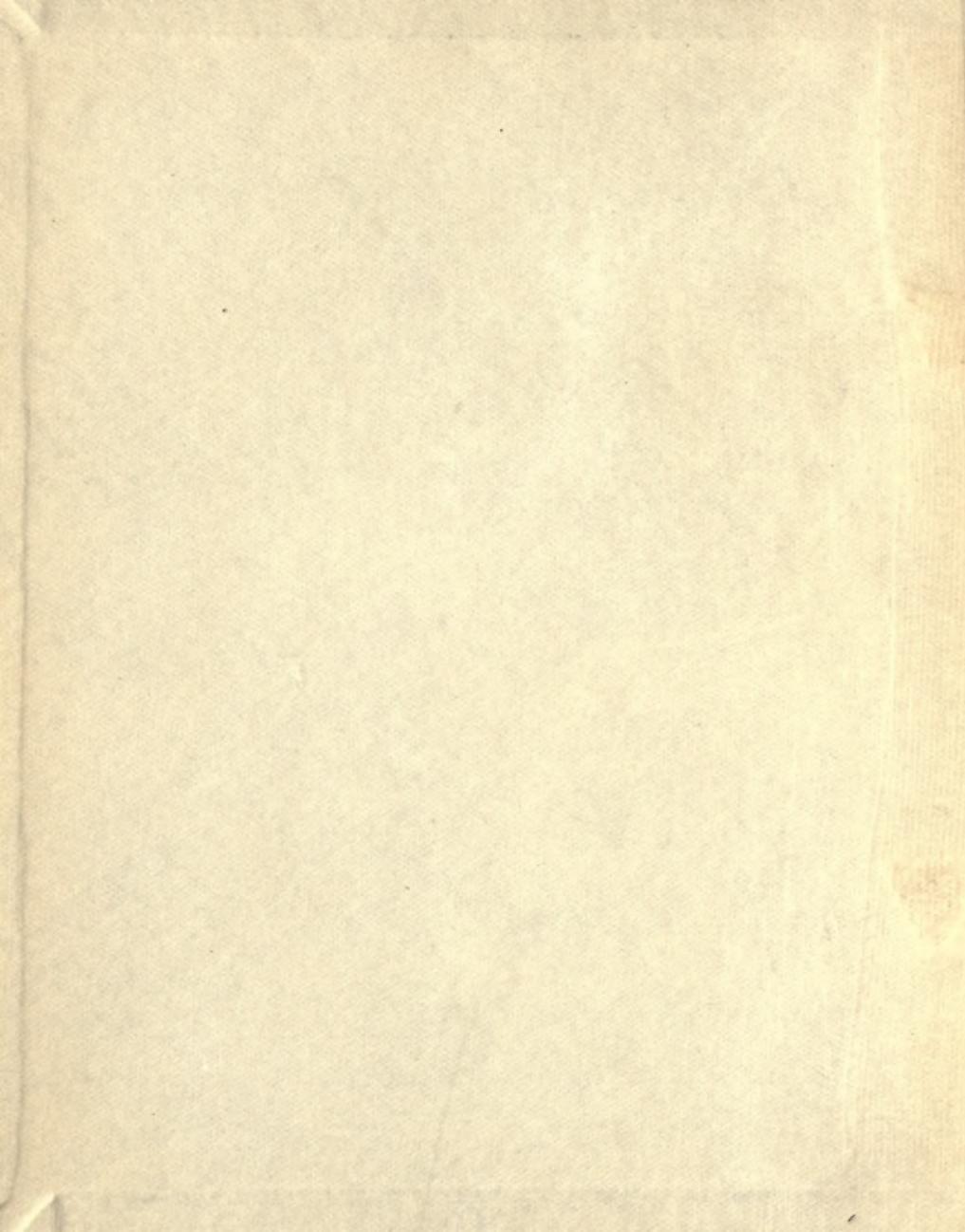
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THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

OF the verse in this book, "King Hermaunce," "Tivoli," "Wayfaring," and "The Singers" were first printed in the late *Northern Counties' Magazine*, *The Saturday Review*, *The Week's Survey*, and *McClure's Magazine* respectively.

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

3

AND OTHER SONG

BY

WILFRID WILSON GIBSON

[1st edition]

1902
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LONDON
ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET
1902

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The Queen's Vigil

I

AMONG her singing maids, within
The garden of the trellised vine,
At angelus Queen Armelin
Drank the rose-fragrant air like wine :
She heard the knell of labour rung ;
She saw the golden sunset-fires
Turn all to soaring flame the spires,
With golden clouds above them hung ;
About her roses idly swung—
Dew-laden censers in the air ;
And weary-hearted maidens sung

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Old melodies of Love's despair
Full-mournfully at day's decline.

She looked across the ridgèd sea
Of basking gables, red and steep ;
The hooded houses tranquilly
Drowsed in a golden haze of sleep ;
No clamour stirred throughout the town,
No murmur from the unseen street
That rang no more to mailed feet :
She saw the white roads winding down
From the high cornlands, glooming brown
With unreaped harvest over-ripe,
Where summer slept with tarnished crown ;
And but some wandering goatherd's pipe
Shrilled, eddying in the silence deep.

Thus she had watched with longing sore,
When armies climbing to the plain,

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Unto the never-ending war,
Had travelled, ere the winter's wane,
With banners blue and harness bright,
That glittered in the frosty sun
Until the valley's crest was won ;
When, fading from her yearning sight,
The blaze of arms in sparks of light
Had perished in horizon grey.
O weary, since, the listening night,
And wearier the watch by day
For banners coming not again !

The while she gazed, the maidens' song
Died on their lips ; and each one breathed
A name, which but a name, too long
With ever-flowering memories wreathed,
In Love's hid chamber of the heart
Had hung : upon the silence came
To Armelin the kingly name

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Of Pellinore ; and, like a dart
That cleft the evening calm apart,
New anguish pierced her. "Pellinore!"
She cried ; yet no fresh tears might start
From eyes wept tearless, though no more
Her lord should come with war-blade sheathed.

Low-bowed as one who, silent, grieves
For some impending woe unknown,
She leant among the trellised leaves,
Crushing the clusters yet ungrown ;
The grapes, unswollen yet and green,
Nor ripened for the gurgling press,
As bitter wine of her distress
Were spilt, beneath her woe, unseen.
The maidens moved not round the queen,
Nor looked on her with pitying eyes ;
For separate sorrows stood between,
Deep-ranged, as serried shades that rise

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Round Love that ever mourns alone.

Then shivered pale the sunset glow;
And dimly through dew-falling gloom
That veiled the slumbering town below,
She saw the vast cathedral loom,
Grey-pinnacled with shadows cold
Where late had flamed the golden spires.
The glow-worm's emerald signal-fires
Lighted the cool, green dusk, and bold
The bats about the ramparts old
Fluttered with silence-weaving flight :
While drowsily above the mould
The roses swung, and on the night
Unloosed their petalled wealth of bloom.

II

In sorrow sped the darkling hours ;

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

In sorrow dawned the flashing morn,
Awaking bright, belated flowers
To keen, brief days of sunshine born ;
Beneath a cold, star-gleaming sky
To perish, by the swift frost slain ;
Or droop through days of autumn rain :
In sorrow noonday drifted by,
Blue-winged, unclouded, heavily
Over the unreaped harvest-lands :
Once more the bells' clear melody
Rang sweet release to weary hands
That toiled, unmated and forlorn.

No voice within the garden stirred ;
Nor throbbing lute nor quivering lyre,
Nor any song of maid or bird ;
Only the shrill and reedy choir
Of frogs that ever-piping wake
In golden lily-cups afloat

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Upon the dark, unripling moat,
When, in the deep and grassy brake,
Unseen the armoured crickets shake
Their whirring wings with soothing din.
While each maid mourned for far love's sake,
Alone, untended, Armelin
Stole out, unknown, in veiled attire.

Her white face hid, her head low-bowed,
She passed the gateway guard unseen:
A wavering, grey, uncertain cloud,
She moved the heavy shades between;
Down through the unheeding town she passed,
Threading with eager haste the maze
Of narrow streets and darkening ways;
Till with tumultuous heart at last,
And straining pulses beating fast,
She came to where in sunlight soared
Exultant, pinnacled and vast,

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Unto the glory of the Lord
The house of Heaven's eternal Queen.

Still through the glittering blue air
The swallows clipped with flashing wings;
And still the evening light shone fair
On sculptured saints and carven kings;
While, pausing in the golden glow,
She saw how wondering Beauty sprung
From chaos when the stars were young,
Then drooped again to labouring woe;
And how the wind-sown weed may grow
To wreath the crown of stone with green,
And martins build their nest below
The braided head of some proud queen,
Whose fame no wandering harper sings.

Resplendent, through the open door,
She saw the southern rose of glass,

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Agleam as if the summer's store
Of cornland flowers that flame and pass—
The poppy red, the cockle blue,
And yellow charlock—gathered there
By angel-hand with tender care,
In fresh, unfading beauty grew,
Imperishably bright and new,
Though now no wind of morning strayed
‘ Mid opening petals, and the dew
That evening dropped with dreamful shade
Fell only in unflowering grass.

Slow-passing through the portal, soon
She rested in the pillared cool:
As oft 'neath arching boughs at noon,
By some fern-shadowed forest pool,
Her heart had drunk the breathing calm
Of solitude, so now, alone
Among the soaring groves of stone,

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

The silence filled her soul like balm.
No longer chant or surging psalm
Waked echoes round the dusky shrine
Of those who bear the martyr's palm,
Which burgeoned in the hands divine
That meekly drove the humble tool.

Above her burned the northern rose
Wherein, enthroned for evermore,
Our Lady of the Seven Woes,
Who earth's grey wreath of sorrows bore,
Reigns; while, with plumage never dim,
The four white doves, with pinions spread,
En aureoled, hover round her head;
And angel-hosts and cherubim
Before her bow; and seraphim
With radiant many-folded wings
Eternally her glory hymn;
And patriarchs and crownèd kings

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Through everlasting day adore.

Slowly the clustering shadows crept
Round Armelin, so still and white:
And slowly, flowing darkly, swept
Through choir and nave the tide of night;
Till, looking upward, she could see
The branchèd vault no longer clear,
As though each mighty, soaring pier
Pillared unknown eternity;
Whence, dropping ever-silently,
Peace fell upon her woe like dew,
And in dark, mournful ecstasy
She dreamed, and comfort filled anew
Her soul long-parched in ruthless light.

Arising, with slow steps she sought
The place where tapers starred the gloom,
Clear and unwavering fires, uncaught

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Within the censers' fitful fume—
Where man's undying worship, ere
The ages out of darkness came,
Had burned a druid-kindled flame.
Thither came Armelin, and there
She kneeled. Upon the wings of prayer
Her faithful spirit fluttering soared,
Lest dawn should bring some fresh despair,
In lonely vigil for her lord
Who strove against embattled doom.

Her white hands folded o'er her breast,
She prayed, and in the dusk they seemed
Like snowy plumes of doves at rest;
While on her hair the gold light gleamed,
Unhindered by her loosened veil,
From countless votive flames that kept
A vigil bright for maids who slept,
For love's lone watchnight all too frail;

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

And over her in moonlit mail,
With blue wings crossed, a seraph shone:
As ever o'er the darkest dale
Burns one clear star when day is gone,
Within the night his glory streamed.

III.

She prayed until the midnight hour
Unceasing, though in weariness
Her head sank, like a drooping flower,
Upon her shadow-broidered dress :
When, clanging loudly through the night,
Full-wide the western door was flung ;
And shrill the startled portal rung
With mailèd tramp, and quivered bright
With glint of steel and torches' light,
That leapt in flaming tongues of red
O'er war-stained casques and faces white,

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

The gold smoke moving overhead,
A glowing cloud above the press.

Slow-wavering through the pillared aisle,
The shadows shrank before the glare,
As if to shelter yet awhile
The queen with her lone sorrow there ;
She rose and looked with pale surprise,
For unto her the pageant seemed
Some strange, bewildering vision dreamed
At midnight, which her waking eyes
Would scatter, as the light that dies
On the low edge of some dark shower,
Or as the gleaming bow that flies
The sun's increasing gold of power
O'er blue seas glittering mile on mile.

But suddenly a new despair
Laid icy clutch upon her heart,
And moved cold fingers through her hair ;

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Within her quivering breast a dart
Of dread more swiftly, keenly stung :
She knew not whence it came nor why,
Only it seemed that she must die ;
Her life for one dark moment hung
Upon a slender thread that swung
Over the still abyss of death ;
Then life's returning tempest wrung
Her bosom, and with sobbing breath
She watched, in silence and apart :

When slowly through the open door
She saw in long procession come
War-weary knights who silent bore
A shrouded form, in sorrow dumb,
On lance-locked shields, that 'neath the weight
Of death's sad burden bended not ;
The fitful torches, flickering, shot
Red gleams about the sombre state

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Of him who shelter sought so late
Within the shadowy house of God
From random-flying shafts of fate,
That ever strew the kindred sod
With shattered splendours, pale and numb.

Through all the echoing nave, unstayed,
They moved with solemn pacing slow ;
Before the altar-steps they laid
Their purple-shrouded burden low ;
Then, one by one, about it kneeled—
In silence of heart-breathèd prayer
That struggled blind with blind despair—
Each mailed knight with head on shield,
Subdued at last in sorrow's field ;
And, sadly, spake a voice forlorn :—
“ Him only unto God we yield.
Here we may watch with him, till morn
Awake the slumbering town to woe.”

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Then from a neighbouring pillar's shade,
Before the words in murmur died,
Moved Armelin, and all dismayed
The knights fell back on either side
As from some midnight phantasy ;
Half-turning in the flickering light,
She stood before them frail and white,
Saying : " Go rest, who faithfully
Have borne my fallen lord to me ;
To-morrow round the stricken throne
Your subject grief may bend the knee ;
To-night my heart would keep alone
The vigil of the widowed bride."

IV.

Unquestioning, they rose, and stole
Into the starry night once more . . .
To Armelin it seemed the whole

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Of life closed with the closing door,
That shut without the breathing world.
She only knew that, with sheathed sword,
Before the altar lay her lord,
The banner of his glory furled ;
While yet, above him hovering, curled
The fume of smouldering torches dim ;
And, as she moved, the darkness swirled
About her, till she came to him,
And, bending, murmured "Pellinore!"

She drew the mantle from his face,
But naught to her the dusk revealed.
With trembling hand she sought to trace
The features hid ; the cold lips sealed
Her fingers touching—swift she pressed
Her own lips to them ; with hot breath
She kissed, as though she strove with death
From his embrace her lord to wrest.

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Awhile, with breast to his cold breast,
She lay, as though in slumber fair,
With low, soft breathing, undistressed.
Unloosened fell her showering hair,
A dim gold cloud upon the shield.

How long in trancèd dream she lay
She knew not ; nor if time swift fled,
Nor whether it were night or day.
She only knew that he was dead,
And waiting o'er : that, in the end,
Because she cried upon his name,
From out the 'wilderling night he came
Strife-worn to her, that she might bend
With love o'er him and gently tend
His body through the last calm hours ;
Death waiting by her like a friend.
She only knew that all her powers
Drifted, with ebbing life, away.

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

But as the waking-dream of dawn
Fell, quivering, through the radiant glass,
She rose, and, for a while withdrawn,
She watched the mournful shadows pass
From his white face. Then, with a smile,
She drew his sword and swiftly pressed
Sharp death to her unflinching breast ;
And sank low by his side, the while
Slowly through nave and choir and aisle
The dimness moved, and wan light filled
The dark ; grey pillars, file on file,
Loomed out ; and, o'er the sleepers stilled,
Spread the far roof's high, vaulted mass.

Then all the eastern windows flamed
Triumphal with arising morn,
And sunlight-stricken hues proclaimed
The miracle of day new-born ;
Again within the soaring choir,

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

With sapphire wings no longer dim,
Flashed out the blazoned seraphim,
Burning with sheer, celestial fire ;
With silent harp and muted lyre,
Young angels in clear-shining green
Glowed fresh and bright as love's desire,
Above the sleeping king and queen,
By strife and sorrow overworn.

King Hermaunce

A Chorus

[Hermaunce, King of the Red City, whilst drinking from a spring in the forest after the heat of the chase, was stabbed by his two foster-sons. As he lay sore wounded, a knight rode by, who, seeing the dying king, bore him swiftly to the Red Ship, which rode at anchor in the bay, and laid him on his golden bed therein. With his last breath the King commanded the knight to pen a letter appealing to the knights of King Arthur's Court to avenge his murder. Then the Red Ship put out to sea, the dread missive folded in the hand of the slain King. The vessel came to shore in the mouth of the Humber, and Sir Palomides receiving the fateful summons at once set sail for the Red City, slew the usurpers, and freed the people from their thrall.]

KING Hermaunce puts out to sea ;
The sea is grey beneath the wind.
King Hermaunce of the Red City !
Mariners, mariners, where are your songs when
the wind is filling the blood-red sails ?

King Hermaunce in his Ship of Red ;
The sea is grey beneath the wind.

KING HERMAUNCE

King Hermaunce on his golden bed,
'Tween the low grey sky and the wide grey sea,
 the moaning water and wind that wails !

Where are your kinsmen, King Hermaunce ?
The sea is grey beneath the wind.

Who swung the sword and who thrust the lance
In splendid tourney and desperate fray, to win
 you honour and pride of name ?

Where is the crown that crowned your head ?
The sea is grey beneath the wind.

Why are your eyes so still and so dread ?
Why is your harness so dulled with blood, and
 who hath broken your sword of fame ?

Why did you lag in the greenwood chase ?
The sea is grey beneath the wind.

What is the shadow that covers your face ?
Why are your lips so cold and blue that leant
 so red to the spring-waters clear ?

KING HERMAUNCE

Why did you leave your golden throne ?

The sea is grey beneath the wind.

Where are the sons you called your own ?

Who rules your kingdom and lords your house,
and harries the heart of your people with
fear ?

King Hermaunce puts out to sea ;

The sea is grey beneath the wind.

King Hermaunce of the Red City !

How shall the slayer escape the slain ? From
the hand of the dead what cunning shall
save ?

King Hermaunce in his Ship of Red ;

The sea is grey beneath the wind.

King Hermaunce on his golden bed !

The dead shall cry, and the just shall heed, and
the Knight-Avenger shall cross the wave !

The Wanderer

I KNOW not what I follow; yet each morn
My pack I lift, and take the road that leads
I know not whither, through what wilds forlorn,
By what drear waste of winter-flooded meads,
Beyond what snow-bright peaks in lucent airs
upborne.

By raven-haunted pinnacles of stone,
Through vast, eternal solitudes I pass
Where all day long across bleak ridges lone
The keen wind shivers through the withering
grass,
Then dies down craggy aisles with low, cold,
shuddering moan;

THE WANDERER

Through valleys glooming black with leafless
trees;

Across wild uplands, gleaming mile on mile
With billowy drifts that under starlight freeze,
Wave after wave, with no dark, cleaving isle—
Like some untraversed world of unknown polar
seas.

And I have fought the tempest on the height,
The bitter, stinging snow that blinding swirls
Over the moorlands, blotting out the light;
Then, sweeping on, in wilder tumult whirls
Across the further fells with desolating flight:

The while I heard Death moving through the
blast

With dry, cold rustling of deep-drifting snow,
And thought to look upon him and at last
The end of all my wandering to know;
But ever muffled close in cloudy robes he passed.

THE WANDERER

Or by dark winter seas beneath the stars
I strayed, and saw white-curdling waters lash
Along black reefs, whereon grey ribs and spars
Of wrecks forlorn for ever toss and crash
On heaving waves among the jagged, seaworn
scars.

Yet not all-songless lies the way before,
And, though for me the southern-hearted bird
May sing o'er moonlit waters nevermore,
By misty northern firths at dawn I heard
The long, cool-piping call of curlews by the
shore.

And I have seen—when soft the west winds
blow
With kindlier breath, and plumed with dove-grey
showers—
Pale-glinting sunbeams light the perfect bow,

THE WANDERER

Rekindling irised hopes of April hours,
Above wet, glistening wastes of slowly-melting
snow.

I know not what I follow; yet each day
Eternal impulses more keenly urge
My eager steps along the wandering way
That runs unwearied ever on the verge
Of far, gold-quivering dawns, beyond horizons
grey.

From storm to storm, yet brighter from the
stress
Of scathing winds, in me the live flame leaps,
That under laden boughs beneath the press
Of summer hours, beside leaf-shadowed deeps,
Slow sank and smouldered dim, grown dull with
heaviness;

THE WANDERER

While every dream that through the dusky
maze

Of tangled branches fluttered on faint wings
Scales now with eagle flight the windy ways;
Each morn some more triumphal vision springs
To quivering life, and soars with seraph wings
ablaze.

Shall all this winter wandering naught avail—
The perils in the wilderness; the sheer
Snow-silent solitudes of hill and dale;
The day-long strife with elements; the clear
Unfaltering quest of faith along the unknown
trail?

Salve Regina!

Above the forest, fleece on fleece
Of golden cloud and fire on fire
Stream upward from the sinking sun.
In breathless ecstasy of peace
Day dies ; and, all day-labour done
In harvest-field and barn and byre,
The brown lay-brothers troop to prayer ;
And slowly through the echoing choir
Rises the hymn of Mary, where
Rank upon rank, in white arrayed—
Their long day's silence grown to song—
Like spirit-forms the fathers throng,
And, glimmering in the dimness, fade.

SALVE REGINA

Deep-throated through the air
Their chanting surges loud and long :—
Dulcis Virgo Maria,
Ora pro nobis,
Sancta Dei genetrix !

Like poplars swaying in the gloom
Beneath the wind of evening bowed,
The white-robed monks in silence bend :
Then, rising, through the dusk they loom,
Unto the prayer's low-breathèd end
Chanting yet louder and more loud—
Each brawny, bearded brother strong
With toiling under sun and cloud,
Deep-voiced as wind, thick boughs among ;
Till, as the angelus of rest
Rings out unto the lonely star
That hangs above the cloudy bar
Of purple glowing in the West,

SALVE REGINA

Slow sinks at last the song,
In echoes dying, strange and far :—
Dulcis Virgo Maria,
Ora pro nobis,
Sancta Dei genetrix !

La Trappe, August, 1901.

Tivoli

Across the vast Campagna, coloured still
With shadows of the early flooding seas
That flowed above it in the ancient days,
To Tivoli, a city built in dreams
Above the pillared streams
Of waters falling through the leafy maze
Of sea-green olive trees
That shade with moving dusk her throning hill,
We strayed one April morn.
Behind us lay the legend of old Rome :
The grey, o'erwhelming dome,
Tombing dead empires sprung of deathless
deeds
To sheer disaster. From the storied gloom,

TIVOLI

Earth-mounded triumphs and time-trampled
state,

And memories forlorn
Of battles bright with banners, and the wild
Victorious youth of heroes born
To mighty peril and star-trammelled fate,
We wandered with eyes bright
And hearts a-hunger for the shrill
Cool piping of Italian reeds,
That shook from olive-clouded vale and hill
Ere Italy, clear-dreaming as a child,
Arose and struggled with her splendid doom.

We climbed the hill and wandered through dim
groves
Of olive trees with twisted roots upreared—
Enchanted dryads striving to be free,
Their yearning forms by fiery passion seared ;
And every little leaf of every tree

TIVOLI

Quivered with breath and murmured of old
loves.

Bewildered by vague fears
Of some lone wood-god stirred
From darkling slumber in the deep of years ;
Alert for sounds unheard ;
And quaking at the flight
Of every startled bird ;
We fled across a striding bridge,
And rested panting on a ridge
In showering April light.

Then suddenly before our wondering eyes
We saw, sun-trancèd, rise
Fair Tivoli, a city built in dreams
Unto the music of her falling streams,
That thunder from her craggy steep
And, flashing, plunge where groves of shadow
sleep.

TIVOLI

Through all the murmurous noon we lay,
And watched the rainbow-coloured spray
From snowy tumult leap,
As if some caverned spirit strove to fling
Some living drops on Vesta's pillared height,
To waken once again that early spring
When in her sacred house
From maiden-gathered boughs
The live flame burst to light eternity.

O temple of grey stone
By roving winds o'erblown,
Thine altars cold, thy secret places bare
To every wandering air ;
From northern hills to thee
My spirit turns ;
Thy long-forsaken fire
New-lit within me burns

TIVOLI

With all the keen desire
Of all the virgin eyes that kindled to the light
Through slow, unfaltering days,
Or watched with steadfast gaze
The clear flame leaping in the heart of night.

Wayfaring

I CAME upon her where the poppies lighted
League after league of green with flames of red.
She looked across the windy morn clear-sighted,
With gleaming throat and lily-lifted head,

Like some fresh-waking flower at dawn discovered
Within a lone, wild place of quivering dew.
About her eyes a fluttering laughter hovered,
Then faded as a bird's flight in the blue.

I passed unknown, yet still my heart remembers
Through wandering years—though other faces
rise

With passionate, burning eyes aglow like
embers—

The calm of blue winds folded in her eyes.

The Singers

WHEN God had loosed the choral spheres
To sweep through spacious night,
One laggard star that, swerving, soared,
He plucked from out the flight.

He brake its fire between His hands;
It fell in shredded flame:
On bridled winds across the void
The sons of singing came,

To rule the world by right of song,
To raze the forts of death,
And hurl high-throned oblivion down
With storm of chanting breath.

The Eternal Way

O WHITHER goest Thou, little Child ?

From Bethlehem to Calvary.

The way is peril-set and wild,
Thy young feet stumble piteously;
Turn Thou that I may shelter Thee.

O whither goest Thou, Son of Man ?

From Bethlehem to Calvary.

What bitter doom of fate doth ban
Thy body to the branched tree ?
Turn Thou that I may shelter Thee.

THE ETERNAL WAY

O whither goest Thou, fair young God?

From Bethlehem to Calvary.

None follows where Thy feet have trod;
In Thy lone immortality
No heart of man may shelter Thee.

Song

If once I could gather in song
A flower from my garden of dreams—
The dew from its petals unshaken,
When starry and bright they awaken—
All men to the wonder would throng.

Though ever at dawning I go
By the marge of the life-giving streams
That, shadowed by blossoms upspringing,
Remember the hills in their singing,
The fells of their birth in their flow;

Or early or late though I fare
To gather my garden of dreams
For the barren, forsaken and lonely;
I bring from the shadow-world only
Pale blossoms that perish in air.

The Waters of Lethe

An unending procession of souls descends to the river ;
Shadow-Spirits hover restlessly above the valley.

The Shadow-Spirits.

HITHER they wander with bewildered eyes,
Where no light falls from vague, unmoving
skies ;
Where sun nor moon nor any starry gleam
Pierces the flowing darkness of the stream :
Hither they wander—faltering, crownless kings ;
Queens pale with peril ; warriors battle-worn ;
Strayed, wondering children, frail with earthly
tears ;
Old men and lone, a-weary of wise years
And labourings long ;
Lovers forlorn
From their bright passion torn ;

THE WATERS OF LETHE

And poets rapt with dream,
Whose lips yet quiver with the dying song,
Whose fingers tremble yet among unsounding
strings.

Hither they wander from the light of day
Down to dark waters ; standing on the shore,
They dream awhile of griefs grown old and grey
And sorrows that will shake their hearts no
more ;

Then leaning low
To Lethe's dim, unmurmuring flow,
They drink oblivion, gliding far away,
Whither our wavering flight
May never hope to stray.
For we on earth ne'er turned
To any timeless star,
But ever followed far
Each meteor-flame that burned

THE WATERS OF LETHE

Awhile within the night;
Till, yielding up our breath,
We heard the voice of doom :—
“ Ye shall not pass the gloom
That lies 'twixt life and death;
But, pale, wind-hovering ghosts,
Shall wander ever the sea
Of darkness washing between
The perilous, pinnacled coasts
Of time and eternity.
In the valley of death shall ye keep
Your vigil, but never of sleep
Shall ye drink, though your dry hearts yearn,
And your grey lips wither and burn;
Never your sorrow shall lean
To the cool-flowing waters and deep.”

A Warrior.

So swiftly have I travelled from the light

THE WATERS OF LETHE

Into this silent vale of shadowy fears,
Mine eyes yet throb with sun ; the din of fight
Yet pulses in mine ears.

Through the fell forest of the foeman-spears
I rode exulting ; in the clash of swords
I triumphed over battle-famous lords,
And slew the pride of many a glittering knight ;
Till, plunging ever deeper in the stress,
I fell beneath a sure, unswerving blade
Into this valley of forgetfulness,
Wherein I wander, through vast groves of shade,
Seeking the flower of love I cast aside
For flash of swords and banners proud unfurled—
The white flower-face that, in my dream of pride,
Of conquered cities and a cowering world,
I left forsaken.

Lo, before me flows
A stream of deep sweet waters, and my lips,

THE WATERS OF LETHE

Thirsting, drink restfulness ; a dull eclipse
Shadows the sun of battle ; bright the rose
Of love unfolds about me, and the gloom
Quivers with opening glories ; darkness glows
To one fire-hearted, splendour-petalled bloom !

Shadow-Spirits.

Beyond the valley shade
He looks with kindling eyes,
Who ever unafraid
Rode under earthly skies,
Nor ever, daunted, turned
From out the path of strife
While yet within him burned
The passionate fire of life.
O that we too might stand
Amid unrustling reeds,
That banner with dark plumes the shadowy
strand !

THE WATERS OF LETHE

O that we too might lean,
The willow boughs between,
To gather in cupped hand
The ever-flowing silence of the river
That, songless, lightless, through the valley
speeds !

O that we too might glide,
With eager eyes and happy lips a-quiver,
Into the mist that veils the further side !

A Maiden.

Ah, whither, whither hath his spirit fled ?
In vain, in vain my fearful, faltering haste
Through the lone hills, across the sunless waste,
Down this deep valley, where I thought to see,
Beyond the shade of each dark, drooping tree,
His bright soul lighting as a flaming sword
The dusky groves of death.
Swift have I followed, but too fleet he sped ;

THE WATERS OF LETHE

As e'er on earth amid the warrior-horde
I followed in the triumph of my lord,
Bright-eyed, with panting breath ;
Until one day from the disastrous field
I saw his body on a litter borne ;
But loosened was the soul that would not yield—
His eyes as forest pools of light forlorn ;
And, gazing in their depths, I could not mourn
The broken sword, the battle-riven shield.
My life fell from me as a grief outworn,
And, like a star that flies through perilous night,
My spirit shaken free
Followed his fleet-winged soul in its victorious
flight.

O darkling waters dumbly flowing,
Hold ye the secret of his travelling feet ?
Hath any sun of splendour glowing
Troubled with glories fleet

THE WATERS OF LETHE

Your swift, unripling flood ? Hath any leant
Low in the reeds that shiver on the brink,
Your brimming rapture of deep peace to drink ?
O willows, where your pendent branches trail
Unwithering tresses in the flowing stream,
I dip my hands, grown shadowlike and pale,
To lift the waters, dropping without gleam,
Unto my drinking lips. The shadows fail ;
Old sorrows scatter as a dream at waking :
O flame of joy, the folded darkness shaking !
O hills of peace that, dawning, calmly rise !
Beneath your shelter, in a dreaming vale,
He waits me with bright welcome in his eyes.

Shadow-Spirits.

One moment pausing with uplifted hands,
Aflame with love she stands ;
Then, clothed with love as with exultant light,
She passes from our sight,

THE WATERS OF LETHE

While deeper darkness closes round our woe,
Our woe that never dies,
Though shed in your swift night old sorrows
drown.

O stream of Lethe, all the gathered tears
Of all the travailing world ; grey age's labouring
years ;

The king's cold state ; the poet's burning crown ;
The glittering woe that love's wild rapture weaves
Fall, withering like September-frosted leaves,
By winds unshaken, fluttering idly down,
And mingle in your dark oblivious flow.

An Old Man.

Sleep, sleep at last—untroubled, starless, deep,
Eternal slumber flowing without dream !
O Lethe, long by divers paths and steep
My feet have sought the solace of your stream :
Wearied my soul of straining for the light,

THE WATERS OF LETHE

That never clove the mist with dawning gleam ;
Mine eyes have searched the vast, aërial night,
The glittering desolation of the stars,
The white-ridged winter of the barren moon ;
And looked upon the shadows of the sun.
The mailed earth no secret held for me ;
I pierced the terror of her ancient scars,
The hunger of her heart's devouring fires.
I fathomed ocean's dim-lit mystery ;
And through the glow of man's triumphal noon
I saw the naked bones of his desires,
And how his grief from early joy was wrought,
His peace by passion spun.
With labour keen I taught my feet to climb,
Mine eyes to scan, unfaltering, without fear,
The ice-bound pinnacles of space and time :
Yet never from the peak my spirit caught
The flame of wings celestial, or the clear
Ethereal music of god-driven cars,

THE WATERS OF LETHE

Nor unto bright, immortal rapture won.
Now, now the false lights fail; vain rumours
cease:
Unto sure rest, at last, forlorn I creep.
I drink of your unfathomable deep,
O flowing stream of peace!
I sink, I sink in sleep.

The Shadow-Spirits.

Sleep, sleep! O stream, do your dark waters
hold
None other solace for the eyes that weep?
Shall they who sow in sorrow only reap
Thy grey, unflowering, cold
Harvest of shadows and eternal sleep?

A Poet.

O valley, beautiful from time's dim birth,
With feet of white souls passing! O deep
groves,

THE WATERS OF LETHE

Still tremulous with the gust of passionate flames
Of song-remembered loves,
And heroes whose bright names
Still kindle in the memory of the earth !
O Lethe flood,
At touch of whose swift waters the frail bud
Of earth-born beauty breaks into unwithering
flower !
Amid your glooms I follow, follow still,
Beauty, whose wandering strays
My feet have ever sought through life's dream-
haunted ways ;
Beauty that, earthward raining hour by hour,
Lights in a dewy shower
In some green dell, and flows
From flower to tree,
From tree to forest-covered vale and hill,
Flooding the earth with ecstasy, and glows
From valleys unto uplands peaked with snows ;

THE WATERS OF LETHE

Then, streaming higher,
Flushes her native skies with cloudy fire,
That, falling, drowns in the all-gathering sea,
To dawn a moon-pale spirit in the night.

O ever-flowing colour, changing form,
Wind-flying flame, blue-soaring melody,
The star of love's bright being and the light
On sleeping children's faces,
Bloom of the desert places, the wild gleam
Cleaving the midnight fury of the storm—
Beauty that, flying, taught my feet to follow
Through winter waste, and summer-dreaming
hollow :

Your torch hath lighted even death's still gloom,
And led where shadows brim
Dark Lethe's silent stream.
O waters dim
With old heroic sorrow, starless grief,

THE WATERS OF LETHE

That drank of you oblivion's dull relief,
Steal not from me, with slumber-breathing fume,
Or soul-dissolving dream,
The gleaming wind, the flower, the flying star
My life has followed through lone years and far.

Cool, cool the waters to my lips ; a veil
Falls from mine eyes ; beyond the gloom I see,
No longer faltering, frail,
The sheer, divine imperishable might
Of Beauty thronèd in eternity.

The Shadow-Spirits.

O that our wings might tire
And falter in their flight ;
The wandering desire
Die down within our breast ·
The keen, devouring fire

THE WATERS OF LETHE

Perish in your deep night !
We crave no rapture bright,
O stream, beyond your shore ;
Only for evermore
To drink, 'mid pale souls leaning, of your dark
waters rest.

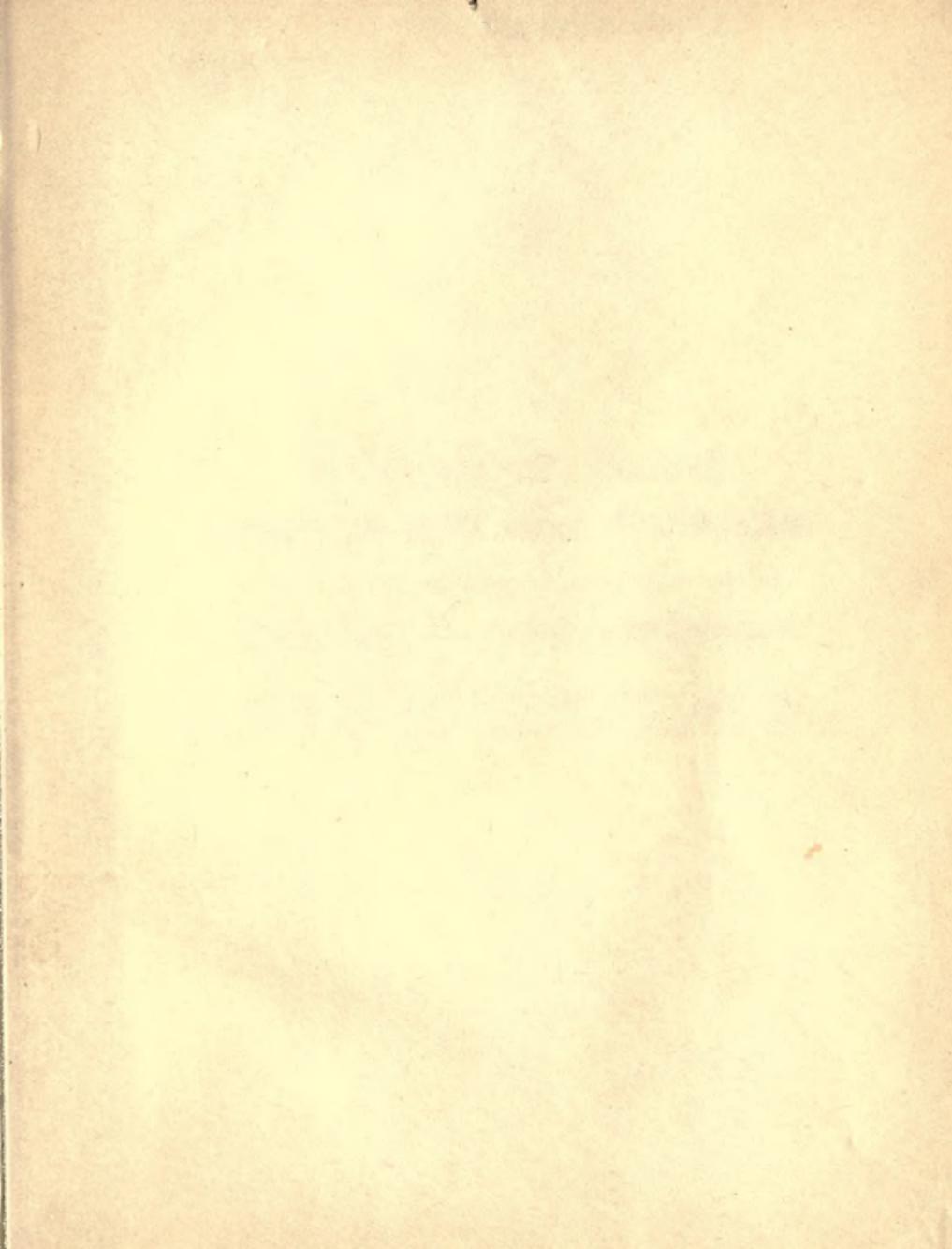
Elegy

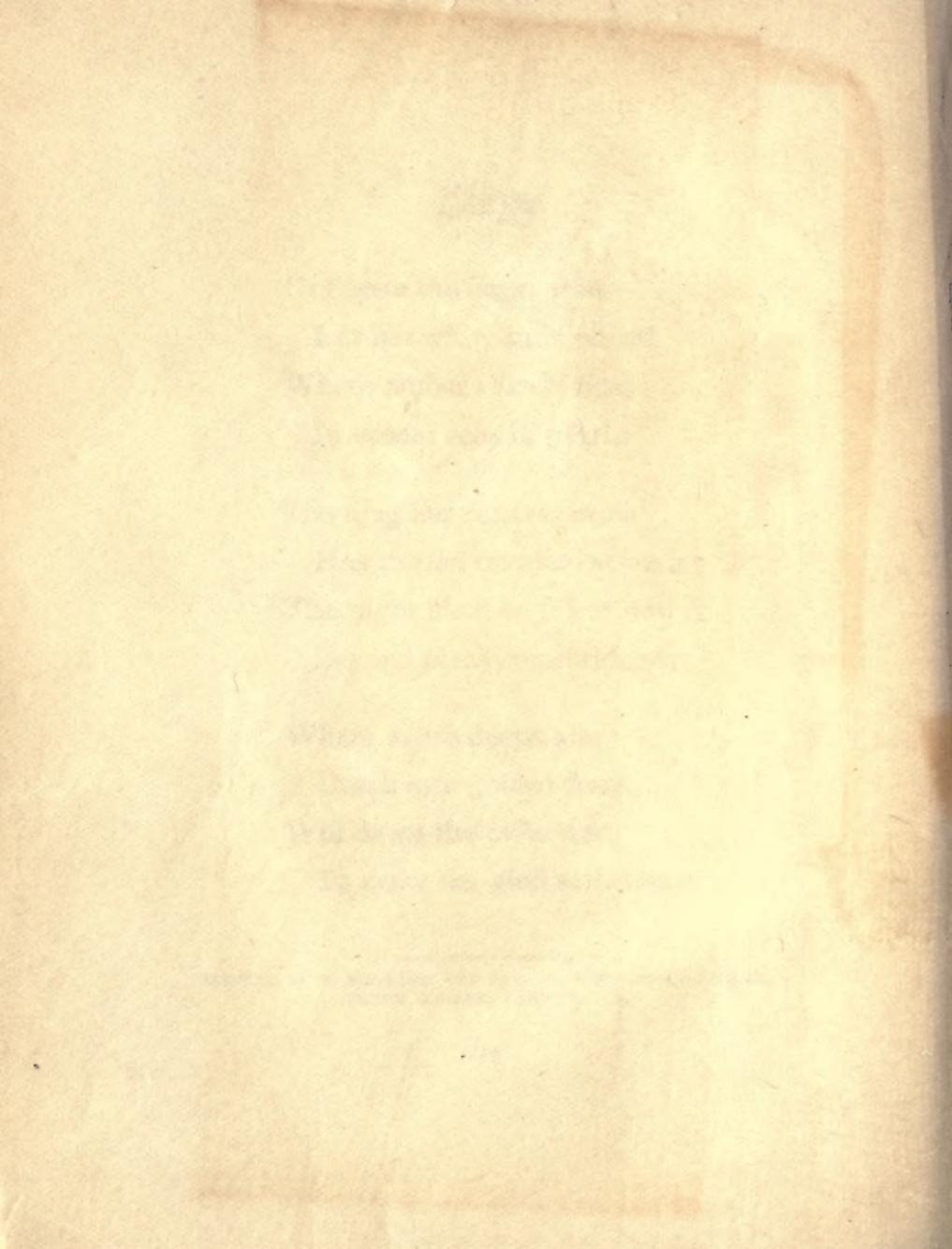
UNLOOSE the eager boat;
Let her white sails unfurl
Where amber islands float
In sunset seas of pearl.

Too long her restless prow
Has chafed on alien strands;
The night shall waft her now
Beyond bleak, mortal lands.

Where azure deeps afar
Break into golden foam,
Will dawn the pilot star,
To draw her glad sails home.

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The Queen's vigil

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